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THE LITTLE CHILDREN
OF THE LUXEMBOURG



HERBERT ADAMS GIBBONS

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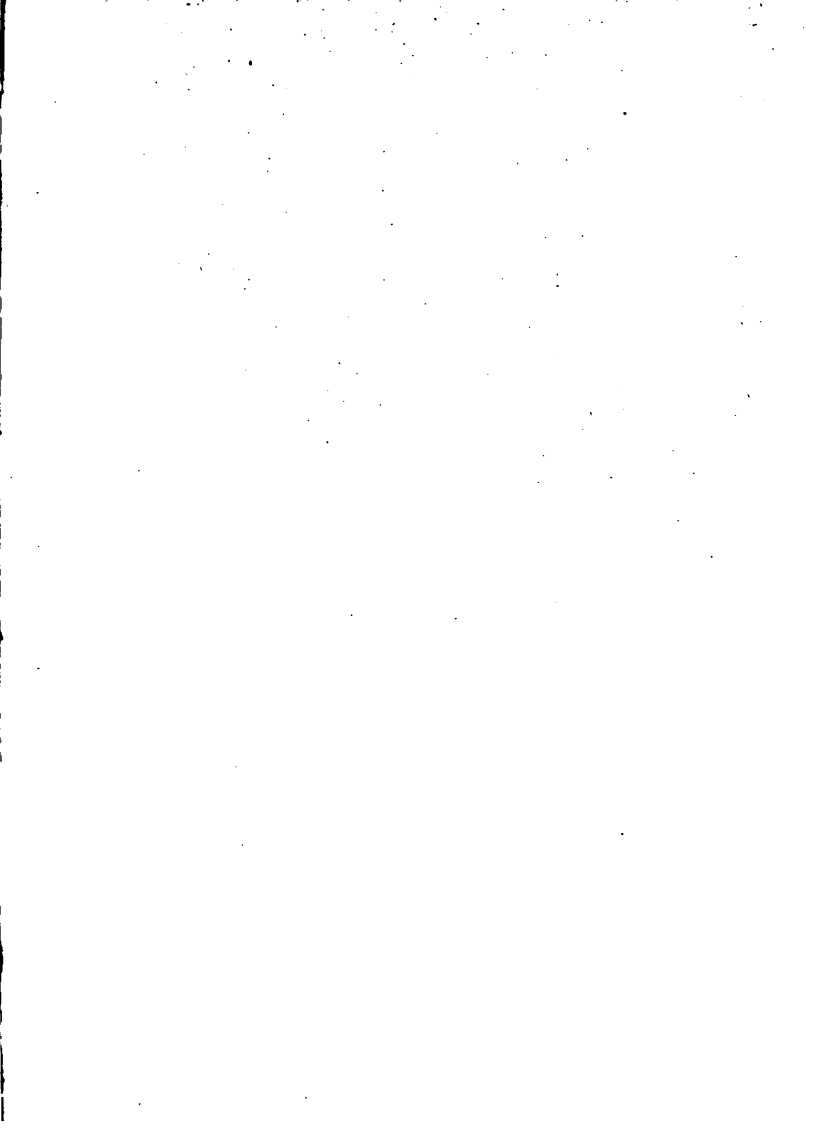


Gratis





**THE LITTLE CHILDREN
OF THE LUXEMBOURG**





**"Then the *chers blessés* pass, and pain, none the less intense
because it cannot be analyzed, grips little hearts."**

THE LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE LUXEMBOURG

BY

HERBERT ADAMS GIBBONS

Author of "Paris Reborn," etc.



WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
BY HARRY B. LACHMAN



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List of Illustrations

"Then the *chers blessés* pass, and pain, none
the less intense because it cannot be
analyzed, grips little hearts" ... *Frontispiece*

	PAGE
"The younger boys from the Lycée Mon- tagne are drilled seriously every day" ..	9
"Children's feet and children's voices made the best noise of all"	13
"A veteran of 1870, tracing the battle- field with his cane in the sand, explains the campaign in the Argonne"	17
"Convalescent soldiers join in the training of the next generation"	21
"Workmen have been laying a gas-main. The opportunity is splendid: real trenches are at hand"	25
"Girls have their essential place in the play armies. Equality begins in the nursery"	29
"War is revealed to one at every turn" ...	33
"Here also is the waffle-man"	37
"The wee women of France are not shelved by the masculine sex"	41
"From the Irish mouth under Mimi's turned-up nose comes a chortle of glee"	45

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"Like their big sisters, the little girls have enlisted for Red Cross duty".....	47
"Dolls are wounded soldiers".....	51
"One has only to look at the children's faces".....	55
"With other fond parents, the Girl and I were standing outside the ropes".....	59
"Yachts are no longer sailing for a prize Battleships are going out after the enemy".....	63
"The grandfather who boasts of having rented boats to men today admirals is still good for twenty years".....	67
"The donkey shakes his head mournfully"	71
"Big trees are fortresses".....	73
"First aid is given".....	77
"Boys who can be bossed are impressed into service as stretcher-bearers".....	79
"Home on eight-days' furlough, after a year in the trenches".....	83
"How the <i>permissionaires</i> treasure the precious moments with wife and babies!"..	85
"The blind are learning, with hesitating footsteps, a new dependence".....	87



"The younger boys from the Lycee Montaigne are drilled seriously every day."



The Little Children of the Luxembourg

ON a June afternoon seven years ago the Girl and I renewed with the Luxembourg what had been for her childhood and adolescent memories and for me a passing acquaintance. As we walked by the row of statues against the wall of the *musée* and skirted the tennis-courts to find a bench in the parterre, we little realized that the Girl was to add motherhood memories, deeper and more precious, and that my acquaintance was to ripen into friendship.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

A few hundred yards away, in the direction of the Panthéon, a band was playing. From the opposite side of the parterre came the *pom-pom* of the *guignol*-man. Everywhere, right and left, near and far, children's feet and children's voices made the best noise of all. Wonderful it was to us that day. We were in dreamland; a spell we did not wish to attempt to analyze possessed us. The morning's express had brought us from Marseilles. Two weeks before, in the interior of Turkey, we had been suffering the horrors of the Armenian massacre. A far cry from Asia to Europe, from savagery to civilization, from the devil in man to the God in child. That was the spell. We understand it in retrospect. Not



**"Children's feet and children's voices made the best
noise of all."**



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

the waltz of "La veuve joyeuse"; not flowers and trees and fountains; not seeing again, after a year under the shadow of Islam, people of our own kind; not a park and a bench, the old familiar blessings of Occidental city life, which one never appreciates until he has lived away from them. The little children of the Luxembourg! The devil might rage, but the world still belonged to God because of His children. The massacres were only a hideous nightmare; our suffering was intensified, and lasted, because we had regarded them as reality. No experience of evil, of pain, of bereavement can crush when there are children around. Life still holds everything; not some things, but *everything*, for

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

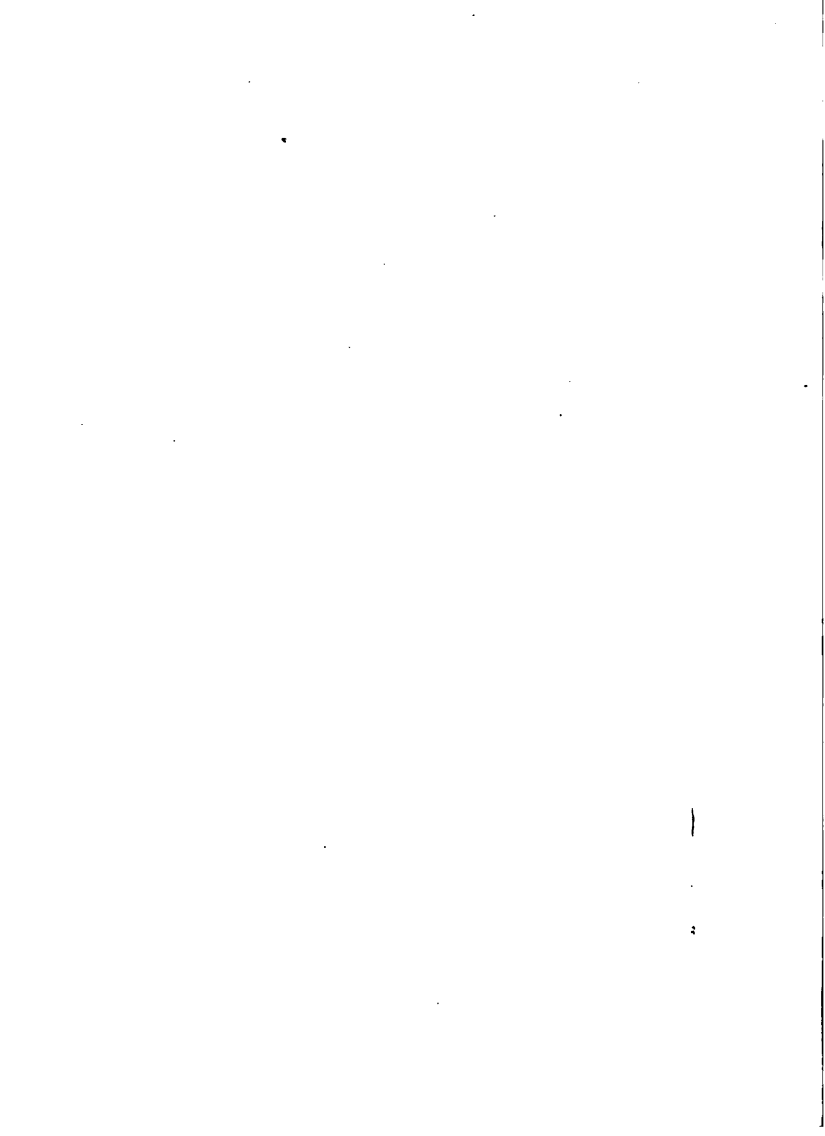
in the renewing of life nothing is lost.

A pair of youngsters in their twenties could hardly have appreciated this great truth had it not been for the fact that a baby-carriage stood before them as they sat under the spell of the little children of the Luxembourg. It was our first purchase at the Bon Marché that morning. We had bubbled over with pleasure and pride when we had it taken right down in the elevator and out on the rue de Sèvres. For there was something to put in it, and there she lay, our three-weeks-old baby, who had already traveled in three continents.

A wee apartment was found in the rue Servandoni, two minutes' walk



"A veteran of 1870, tracing the battle-field with his cane in the sand, explains the campaign in the Argonne."



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

from the Luxembourg. We furnished it in one hour for five hundred francs—all the money we had in the world. That was why I had to write something quickly. While the Girl was getting supper that evening, I unpacked my type-writer from its battered leather case, drew a sigh of relief that nothing was broken, and put it on our one and only table. Before giving way to plates and knives and forks, there was time to make a start at least. I typed out the title, "The Little Children of the Luxembourg," and just then the Girl called for me to run out and buy some butter. Back at my work, I started in: "It was—" A can of peas had to be opened. The Girl confessed that this was a mystery to her, and I

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

found that it was a trick requiring time and thought on her husband's part. Then the table was needed, and the type-writer went to the floor.

It ended there: other things came up. In those days continuity of effort had no place in the vision of a *littérateur* who saw the goal shining so brightly that the way to get there was obscured. After all, there was nothing particular to say about the little children of the Luxembourg without grinding it out, and the Girl sympathized with the *littérateur* in confusing inspiration and application. Editors, who appreciated neither poems nor essays, were anathema to her, too.

Seven years! Bored with the general "bum feeling" of a cold in the



“Convalescent soldiers join in the training of the next generation.”

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

head, the *littérateur*, who had evolved into one of a hundred newspapermen in Paris, was trying to find some novel form of amusement to while away an afternoon's absence from his office. He picked up a bundle, labeled "Articles to be written," which had not been untied since the golden days of the rue Servandoni. What could be more fun than to go through them? The paper came to light: "The Little Children of the Luxembourg. It was—".

With the years, pleasant changes had come, and I knew more about the little children of the Luxembourg, summer and winter, spring and autumn. I knew more because the three-weeks-old traveler in three continents was

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

now the eldest of four. A brother and sister played with her in the Luxembourg, and there was still a three-weeks-old baby for the carriage. I knew more because there is no truth in the old maid and bachelor saying that parents think only of their own children, and have no time for, or interest in, those of others. Let spinsters and bachelors talk all they want; they don't know, that's all. The more kiddies you have yourself, the more you appreciate other people's kiddies. And other people who have kiddies do not need to be assured that this is true.

To grown-ups the Luxembourg means a delightful and embarrassing choice of places to sit. Every bench,



“Workmen have been laying a gas-main. The opportunity is splendid: real trenches are at hand.”



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

from the pear-garden at the rue Vavin entrance to the fountain of Catharine de' Medici over by the Odéon, has seen me unfold my "Temps" of a summer evening with a sigh of contentment as I sniffed flowers and grass and leaves. Every nook from the kiosk of the old woman who sells the best hoops at the upper rue de Vaugirard entrance to the shady wall of the Ecole des Mines by the Boul' Miche' has welcomed me to the joy of an undisturbed hour with my book. And yet, when I go to the Luxembourg, I never know where to sit. Even an Englishman would find it hard to become wedded to one spot where all are alluring. Oh, this bother of choice! I suppose that is why I have never resented the mob of a

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

Sunday afternoon; for then the problem of choice does not confront you. *If* there is a place, you sit where that place is.

To children the Luxembourg means a delightful choice of things to do, and choice is not a problem to them. They are free from the torture of decision. What comes first they tackle, and then go on to the next thing. If children did not get tired once in a while, perpetual motion would have been discovered outside of the laboratory. As it is, parents are nearer finding it than physicists. It is lucky for me that the older I get the less inspired the "Temps" is, and the less I feel the necessity of reading^g all the news for fear something escapes me. It is



**"Girls have their essential place in the play armies.
Equality begins in the nursery."**



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

lucky for me that the older I get the less I hold to book knowledge. After all, the *summum bonum* of much knowledge (in the objective form) is to feel that it really is a weariness to the flesh. The infallible sign of intelligent growth in wisdom is an increasing inability to take oneself seriously. If I regarded my duties and my own importance in the scheme of things as I used to when I first thought I was shouldering responsibilities, I should long ago have broken down under their burden. Physicians have made much money by having to bother with people who have never come to themselves. But would they not rather have done without the fees? The near-sick are the soul-squeezers of the practitioner.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

What I wrote about sitting in the Luxembourg refers to the past and not to the present. I am glad that I feel as I do about the "Temps," for there is no longer one wee baby who "stays put" in her carriage and demands attention only from her mother. Three husky, rollicking children claim me the very moment I appear. I might avoid them, but, funnily enough, I do not want to, even to secure for myself the luxury of sitting on a bench, biting the end off a *carré à deux sous*, and reading. The match-box stays in my pocket; so does the "Temps." I am taken in tow, and appropriated for definite purposes; then begins the round that never tires. It is always the same; but it never tires.



"War is revealed to one at every turn."



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

First the beehives, where the story must be told of how honey is made and why the honey-makers had better be left untouched. That doesn't last long. Children are as keen for action in papa as editors for action in stories.

The *allée* leading from the rue de Fleurus to the *grand bassin* means nothing to the tourist. His eyes are fixed upon the dome of the Panthéon, framed by the half-mile of foliage that shuts out everything else. He looks neither to the right nor to the left until he reaches the parterre. To the children that parterre is the end of a half-day's journey, for here, in the *allée*, are the *balançoirs*, the *chevaux de bois* steeplechase, the *chevaux de bois* merry-go-round, and the *guignol*. Here also

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

are the kiosks for *pain d'épice* and the waffleman.

Were you justifying your existence by the work you did today in your atelier? Not a bit of it! The children show you how absurd a thought that was. The world would wag on just as well without your work; not a living soul would miss it. But here, to three precious living souls, papa's strong arms to put them on the wooden horses are indispensable, and more indispensable still the sous from papa's purse to pay for the fun. Titine and Lloyd and Mimi choose their steeds. Titine, ever a cautious baby, has a preference for Madame Giraffe. The neck is thin enough to give a feeling of security, since little arms can encircle



“Here also is the waffle-man.”



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

it, and this is more than can be said of other animals who have been tried and passed up. From the first day he made bold to ride, Lloyd has been fascinated by the very yellow Monsieur Lion, whose neck is frozen in a turn, and who grins reassuringly at his rider. Only this last month has Mimi graduated from the ignominious safety of the chariot with red plush cushions, which rests on half-swans, to the daring of a whole animal. She is trying them all, and has not settled upon one to cling to. But already—how immediately independence asserts itself!—she resents the straps, those shameful symbols of babyhood.

The merry-go-round, however, is by no means just for fun. Play with

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

children has invariably a serious purpose, which is more than can one say of work with their elders. Grown-ups have lost the art of play because they have forgotten how to be sincerely serious—serious by instinct. We are serious by effort; *ergo*, we are clumsy and half-hearted in our play. It is heresy, dreadful heresy, to say it, I know, but I often think that here is the secret of the craving for alcohol. Man wants to get away from his stupid, habitual self as evolved, the sad product of repression of instinct and expression of volition.

When the music starts, Titine and Lloyd fall to grabbing rings and hoping for the brass one, which means a stick of candy. Look at their faces,



**“The wee women of France are not shelved by
the masculine sex.”**



OF THE LUXEMBOURG

and be convinced that children are lucky wild birds until they get in the cage of our educational system, bred of convention and breeder of mediocrity. From the Irish mouth under Mimi's turned-up nose comes a chortle of glee that cannot be drowned by the wheezy organ-pipes. Her freckles shine with joy, and her red hair is tossed in the pride of being 'way up there on the great big zebra. She looks down with contempt on frightened babies who refused to ride, and lost

The good they might have won
By fearing to attempt.

The mother of the merry-go-round
is wise in her many days and three
generations. She learned long ago not

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

to discriminate, and that is why she has made her fortune in catering to children. A stick of candy goes with the brass ring, but every other kid gets a stick of candy, too. The worst break I ever made in my life occurred six months ago. I doubt if I have yet been quite forgiven for it. I had been off to the other end of Europe on one of my too frequent trips, and the first day at the Luxembourg, after my return, I had forgotten all about those sticks of candy. I lifted Lloyd from his horse, and, heedless of the protest he was trying to make, took him out of the inclosure before, from his burst of heartbreaking sobs, I realized that I had forcibly prevented him from going to the old woman for his candy. I



**"From the Irish mouth under Mimi's turned-up
nose comes a chortle of glee."**



**"Like their big sisters, the little girls have enlisted
for Red Cross duty."**

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

simply could not make it up to him. To my son I was as the Germans are to the Belgians. Atonement is not in a child's scheme of things, and he indignantly refused a franc's worth of sweets, purchased despite his mother's dismay at a near-by kiosk. I ought not to have done it, that was all. I ought not to have done it.

The swings and steeplechase and merry-go-round are only the beginning of the afternoon's work. Now comes the *guignol*, greatest of Paris institutions, and unique joy of Paris children. We leave behind the stirring music of the merry-go-round, and with each thump of the drum we are approaching, joy is manifest from feet to curls. Wee hands clasp big sous, and the

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

children are off along the well-known way, mingling with other *tabliers*, to push in beyond the magic rope for a seat at the Punch and Judy show. There is no "first come, first served" at the *guignol*. There is no fear of not getting a good place. Monsieur and Madame know their business as well as the most famous impresario. I doubt not that many a New York or London manager would be glad to have their bank-account. The seats are all in front of the stage and graduated. There is no need for signs. Kids cannot read signs. But the seats are none the less reserved for their particular clientele. Big kids never crowd in ahead of babies. From the three-year-olds in front, they mount to



"Dolls are wounded soldiers."

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

the ten-year-olds in the rear rows. When there is room, a few grown-ups are allowed in.

I shall not attempt to tell about the show, nor how it is received by the children. An impression of the *guignol* cannot be conveyed by writing or by painting. Only the camera catches it. Standing outside the ropes and listening to the same old story and watching the same commonplace antics of Punch, Judy, the policeman, the thief, the soldier, the maid-servant the butcher's boy, and the pawnbroker, I wonder by myself how and why it amuses for six or seven years, certainly for four or five. Perhaps variety is not the spice of life with children. But the proof of the pudding is in the eat-

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

ing. One has only to look at the children's faces and listen to their laughter to realize that Punch and Judy and the others are "delivering the goods." Titine is in her fifth *guignol* year, and still comes for sous. Mimi is just starting, and her eyes brighten, and her laugh rings out to prove that it works, and is working, with the thousands of Titines and Lloyds and Mimis who give their sous to the man with the drum.

With other fond parents, the Girl and I were standing for the several hundredth time (I ought to begin to be saying the thousandth now) outside the ropes.

"How do they get away with it?" I asked the Girl. "Day in and day out,



"One has only to look at the children's faces."

year in and year out, generation in and generation out, how do they find enough change of topic to interest the same clientele?"

The Girl looked at me with amused tolerance.

"You write a newspaper article every day," she said. "How do you get away with it? Why do your readers stand for it? There are only seven keys on the piano, and yet all the music in the world has come from them. It is a question of permutations and commutations—endless, just as in algebra."

Now we make for the *grand bassin*, where the greatest sport of all is awaiting us. As we pass under the trees to reach the steps, the Girl and I look

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

with interest at the clever croquet the old men are playing. We must stop a minute to watch some of the strokes. It is as skilful as billiards, this game, and nowhere can you see such split shots as here, and as in golf the hazard of uneven ground prevents the game from becoming too mathematical. But the kids tug immediately. To them the game is stupid. Titine has more than once expressed her astonishment and disgust that grown-ups should so waste their time.

The world of kiddies is all their own, peopled with little folk. When they walk with their elders, they are oblivious to grown-ups. But they never miss seeing children, and they have the keenest interest in all other members



“With other fond parents, the Girl and I were standing outside the ropes.”

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

of *their* world. A child would no more fail to see other children in the street than a dog would fail to see other dogs. I have tested this.

‘Whom did you see in the Luxembourg today, Titine?’

“Lots and lots of kids. There was a little boy—” and so on for half an hour.

“Were there many grown-ups? Tell me now about the grown-ups you saw.” Silence and an embarrassed laugh.

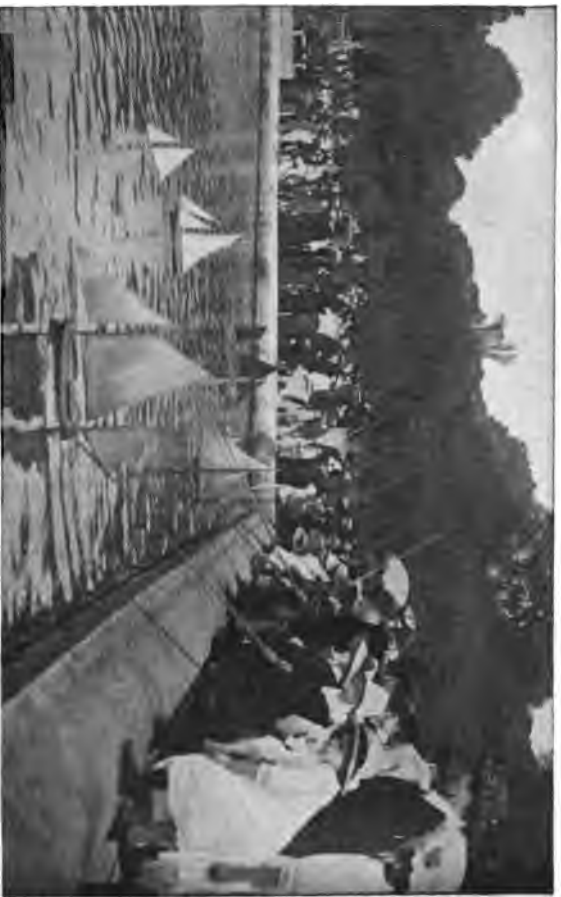
“Papa’s a joke,” declares Mimi. That settles it.

Since the war began, however, there is an important exception in Paris to this axiom of child psychology. The children have taken the soldiers into

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

their world. So it is that, when we go down the steps to the *grand bassin*, the two soldiers on guard in front of the *palais* are spied.

“*Voilà les sentinelles!*” cries Titine. Lloyd salutes. Mimi yells, “*Soldats! soldats! là, maman! là, papa!*” Standing rigidly by their *guérites*, with fixed bayonets gleaming in the sun, their presence contrasts strangely with the background of flowers and the foreground of hoop-rolling girls and boat-sailing boys. They have always been in front of the Palais du Sénat, but now they seem different in their habitual setting. Their immobility, their very presence here, is unreal. How can valid men be spared from what we call “out there,” fighting for France?



"Yachts are no longer sailing for a prize. Battleships are going out after the enemy."

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

I had not intended to speak of the war. One always resolves, when he writes, to forget the war. But even in the Luxembourg, when you are with, and engrossed in, the children, the war enters, for it is an essential factor in our life. It is *our* war. We cannot rid ourselves of the thought of it, of the burden of it. The children accept it, and, as with all the serious things of life, incorporate the war in their play.

Boats there are in the *grand bassin*, all sorts and conditions of them, just as one always finds them on a good afternoon when the wind is blowing gently. And eager faces are gazing intently from the stone coping. But the game is different in these days of

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

war. Yachts are no longer sailing for a prize. Battleships are going out after the enemy. The hunt is one-sided, however, as few boys are willing to sacrifice themselves for the common good by having their boats fly an enemy flag. In the *grand bassin* the German flag is as scarce as it is in the North Sea.

If physical activity be a criterion, the grandfather who boasts of having rented boats to men today admirals in the Mediterranean and members of the cabinet is still good for another twenty years. When Lloyd goes to choose his boat in the fascinating shipyard, I often chat with the ship-owner. He never fails to tell one that he stopped growing old when he reached sixty.



"The grandfather who boasts of having rented boats to men today admirals is still good for twenty years."

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

Today he asked his new joke (new, since he has been repeating it for only fifteen months, while the joke before the war had been tried for fifteen years).

“Let me see, you want a German boat, is it not?” he asks, bending over with a toothless grin.

“No!” shouts Lloyd, tense almost to tears. “The Germans are—”

Why repeat it all? I try to remain cosmopolitan and to call myself a neutral, but my son is neither cosmopolitan nor neutral. The letter of boats nods approvingly, and pats the boy on the back. Lloyd, mollified, admonishes him with a “*Pas de blague!*” For a franc Lloyd gets a boat big enough to require papa’s assistance.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

From naval warfare we turn to join the army. The donkeys, drawing empty carts, shake their heads mournfully. They do not understand their loss of popularity, which, I find, is due to their exploiter's lack of appreciation of child psychology. Early in the war the children saw that the donkey-man would stand for no nonsense. He did not want his carts used as ambulances, dragged around after the advancing battle-line; so, save on Sundays, his pickings are poor. He would gladly be a good sport now, but the children have boycotted him. He is even suspected of being a *Boche*.

We climb the steps of the parterre, and walk along the alleys of the Observatoire on our homeward way. Every-



"The donkey shakes his head mournfully."



"Big trees are fortresses."

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

where the children have organized themselves into armies. Big trees are fortresses. It is possible, even inside the iron gates, to storm redoubts and trenches. For workmen have been laying a gas-main from the rue de Vaugirard to the Boul' Miche'. Mercifully they are doing it slowly. The opportunity is splendid; real trenches are at hand.

Near the upper gate a group of older boys (older means from ten to thirteen) is gathered around a veteran of 1870, who, tracing the battle-field with a cane in the sand, explains the campaign in the Argonne. Another veteran drills seriously every day the younger boys from the Lycée Montaigne. Convalescent soldiers join

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

in the training of the next generation.

Girls have their prominent and essential place in the play armies. The wee women of France are not shelved by the masculine sex. Equality begins in the nursery. Jumping-ropes and hoops have been laid aside for happier days. Even diabolo is losing ground. Tennis-rackets gather dust on the upper shelf of the hall closet. Dolls are wounded soldiers, and doll carriages, if used at all, are ambulances. Like their older sisters, the little girls of the Luxembourg have enlisted for Red Cross duty, and follow the armies to give first aid on the battle-field. Park benches are improvised hospitals. Set forth on them, bottles, cotton, and



"First aid is given."





“Boys who can be bossed are impressed into service as stretcher-bearers.”



bandages show their stern reality of the play. The nurses wear the regulation headgear, with the cross upon the forehead. Smaller boys, who can be bossed, are impressed into service as stretcher-bearers.

The children reflect the spirit of the nation and the work of the nation. The war has first place in the minds of all; it has first place in the efforts of all. Is not play at its best an imitation of what the grown-ups are thinking and doing?

And in the Luxembourg the other side of the war is revealed to one at every turn. War means glory and immortality only to poets and orators; to the rest of the world it means suffering and death. I am reluctant

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

to go with my children to the Luxembourg these days, for it seems like flaunting my immunity in the face of everybody. Other fathers are at the war—or are not. Children's guardians are grandfathers. Black is the prevalent color in dresses.

Soldiers there are a-plenty. Some, vigorous and bronzed, are *permissionnaires*, home on eight-days' furlough after a year in the trenches. How they treasure the precious moments with wife and babies. But by far the greater number in uniform are wounded and convalescents. In every *allée* one meets the maimed on crutches; or the blind, who are learning with hesitating footsteps a new dependence on cane or loving arm. As they pass, the



"Home on eight days' furlough, after a year in the trenches."



"How the *permissionnaires* treasure the precious moments with wife and babies!"





**"The blind are learning, with hesitating footsteps,
a new dependence."**

OF THE LUXEMBOURG

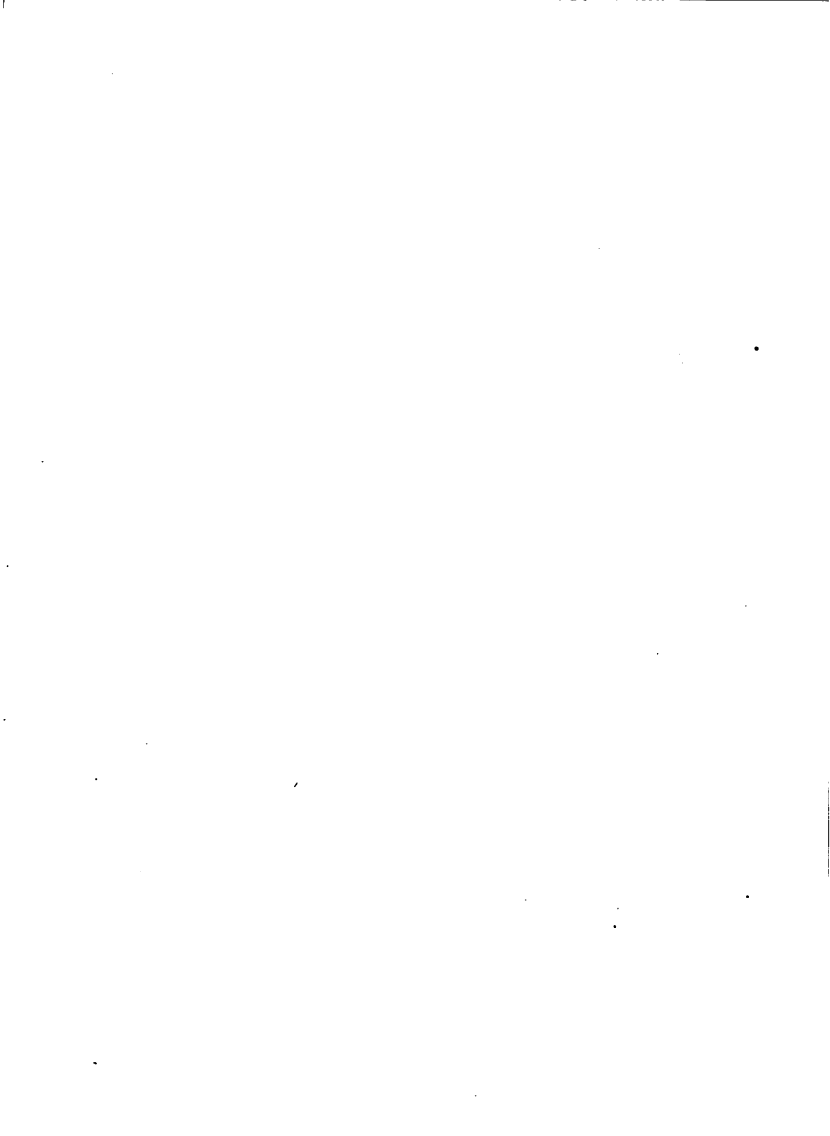
chers blessés, the children pause in their play and salute them silently. Tear-filled eyes and lips that have scant respite from quivering bear witness to the children's knowledge of what war means. They are not allowed to idealize war as they would instinctively do; in the enthusiasm of earnest play the glory of war should be uppermost. But then the *chers blessés* pass, and pain, none the less intense because it cannot be analyzed, grips little hearts.

Were it not for the very fact itself of little children in the Luxembourg, this would be too sad to write about. The blessing, the healing virtue, the inspiration of the Luxembourg is not in flowers and trees, in fountains and

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

fresh air. It is in the children, the hope of the nation.

So when a young woman passes, carrying a dog and cooing to it, one has reason to believe that a heart is lacking, else it would break.







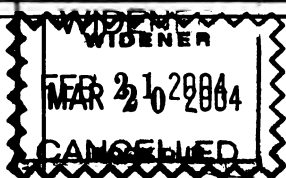




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